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**Aspects of the Neuropsychological Development and Assessment of New Zealand
Children**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Clinical Psychology

at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

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2018

Abstract

Typical neuropsychological development in school age children is an under-researched area. There is insufficient research on age effects on performance, relationships between multiple cognitive abilities and between these abilities and academic achievement. In addition to this, there has been no research conducted on neuropsychological assessment practices with children in New Zealand (NZ). This thesis explored patterns of neuropsychological development in typically developing children and provides clarity on the current practices of psychologists conducting neuropsychological assessment with children in NZ.

Study 1 explored the age effects on neuropsychological measures for typically developing children aged 6 to 11 years. Firstly, the scaled scores of NZ children were compared with overseas normative groups and found to be within ± 0.4 of a standard deviation for all tests except for finger tapping and animal sorting (NEPSY-II). Secondly, age effects were found for all measures of cognitive abilities which is consistent with previous research. Post-hoc findings identified that the most significant improvement occurred between ages 6 and 9 years. The existence of differences between NZ and USA samples, specifically found for animal sorting and finger tapping (NEPSY-II), indicates that New Zealand normative data would be beneficial for some subtests used in neuropsychological assessments.

Study 2 investigated the relationships between cognitive domains and school achievement in typically developing New Zealand children. Correlational analyses found that the majority of the relationships between the cognitive domains were moderate to weak, which is consistent with overseas literature. The findings were mixed in regards to the relationships between neuropsychological ability and school achievement. Most significant relationships with overall school achievement were found in the domains of social perception and working

memory, followed by processing speed, executive functioning and language. While this was congruent with the hypothesis of the study and with the literature, the finding of a non-significant relationship between motor skills and academic achievement was incongruent. Investigating these relationships across age groups revealed that age 6, 10 and 11 years are the periods of middle childhood with the strongest relationships between neuropsychological ability and achievement.

Study 3 was a survey of psychologists who routinely undertook cognitive and neuropsychological assessments with New Zealand children. The WISC-IV was the most commonly used comprehensive measure to assess cognitive and neuropsychological function of New Zealand children and the most commonly used rating scales are the ABAS, CBCL and CCBRS. The results of the survey indicated that test selection appears to be based on familiarity and access. The focus on the diversity of New Zealand culture in the literature was reflected in the finding that the majority of the survey respondents considered it important to obtain normative data for New Zealand children (80.3%).

In summary, these findings provide clarity around patterns of performance of typically developing children and informs the practice of neuropsychological assessment with New Zealand children.

Acknowledgements

I firstly want to thank the children, parents and psychologists who participated in this research. Without the time and effort that they put into participating, this research would not have been possible. I'd also like to thank all the schools who so warmly welcomed and accommodated us.

To my primary supervisor, Professor Janet Leathem, thank you for your commitment, encouragement and dedication to my growth as a researcher. Your expertise and enthusiasm for research is inspiring. Thank you for your patience and constant support during this journey. I feel so fortunate to have had you as my supervisor.

To my second supervisor, Associate Professor Ross Flett, thank you for your well-timed support and humour.

I would also like to thank the Centre for Public Health Research. I am grateful for the support I received and appreciate the efforts that were taken to make this process as smooth as possible. In particular I'd like to thank Jeroen, Jean, Nathalie, Amanda and Hilary.

I have been so fortunate to have such incredible peer support throughout this process. The friendships that have developed during my years in T4 have meant so much to me. Specifically, I want to thank Yanis, Rach, Lou, Grace, Char and Tam for all the encouragement, fun, floor times and struggles we shared together.

I am so fortunate to have so many resilient, strong and compassionate role models within my family who have supported me to reach this stage of my education. I would not be completing this work without them. I firstly want to acknowledge my darling Nanas, who passed away during the completion of this work. Thank you for teaching me strength and kindness. To

my parents, Trish and Chris, thank you for teaching me to work hard and for always being there when it felt like too much. I am so grateful for your unwavering belief in me. To my siblings, Hannah, Chris and Liam, thank you for the all treats, coffees and laughter. I'm lucky to have your support. To my Lance, thank you for supporting me in everything I do. I appreciate all the things you've done which have made this process easier. Supporting me to finish this work full-time, lending me your brain when I got stuck and being there during my imposter syndrome meltdowns.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari, he toa takitini

(Success is not the work of one, but the work of many)

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